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Winchester term limits policy ends Jimmy Johnson's two-decade tenure on CPC

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

January 15, 2025 . 6:00 AM — 3 min read

James 'Jimmy' Johnson, left, and Enzo Rascionato, right, present their cases for appointment to the Capital Planning Committee during the Winchester Select Board meeting on Jan. 13. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/WILL DOWD

In a unanimous decision that highlighted the tension between p institutional knowledge and promoting new voices in town government,

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the Winchester Select Board voted Monday to appoint Enzo Rascionato to the Capital Planning Committee, replacing longtime member James "Jimmy" Johnson who had served for approximately 20 years.

The appointment came as a result of a Select Board policy requiring committee members to step down after serving three consecutive terms, with a one-year waiting period before being eligible for reappointment. The policy was designed to encourage broader community participation in town governance.

"I'm a rule follower," said Select Board member John Fallon during the Jan. 13 deliberations. "If we want to change the policy, then we should change the policy ... I don't want to gerrymander the policy, because then that erodes trust."

Johnson, who has been involved in Winchester town government since 1985, made a strong case for his continued service, citing his extensive experience with major town projects, including the flood mitigation program and various capital improvements.

"I know this town better than most people," Johnson told the board. "I care about it. I've gained respect of other people by working hard."

Rascionato, who served six years on the Finance Committee, including roles as vice chair and chair, presented himself as someone who could bring fresh perspectives while respecting the committee's established processes. He holds degrees in finance and has experience managing large-scale projects and facilities.

"I think bringing a fresh perspective would be good for the committee," Rascionato said, acknowledging Johnson's superior experience. "Jimmy has got more CPC knowledge than I'll probably ever know."

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The decision proved challenging for board members, who recognized both the value of Johnson's experience and the importance of maintaining consistent policies.

Select Board member Bill McGonigle called it "the worst test scenario we could ever possibly have" for applying the term limits policy.

"Mr. Johnson has been on the capital committee, maybe since it was first created, certainly longer than I've been around town," said McGonigle. "It's hard to think of capital without him, and it is a big priority for me that we start getting some new blood in but if there's one exception to that, it's probably Jimmy Johnson on the Capital Planning Committee."

The Capital Planning Committee faces significant challenges, including managing limited financial resources amid growing infrastructure needs. Both candidates emphasized the importance of strategic financial planning, with particular attention to upcoming major expenses such as fire truck replacements, which could cost up to $3 million each in the next five years.

The committee's current prioritization process also came under scrutiny during the interviews.

Select Board member Michael Bettencourt argued the existing ranking system needs modernization, suggesting that "the way that we do our capital planning is antiquated and it doesn't lend itself to prioritizing things in the way that really needs to be prioritized."

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Johnson defended the current process, noting the committee already maintains a flexible multi-year outlook.

"We have a plan that works," he said. "Is it perfect? No, but nothing in government is perfect."

The board's decision reinforced its commitment to the term limits policy, even in cases where highly qualified incumbent members are affected.

Select Board member Anthea Brady suggested the policy's implementation might need refinement, particularly in how departing members are notified and how new candidates are recruited.

"Maybe we haven't positioned ourselves to enact this policy in the right way," Brady said, suggesting positions should be clearly advertised as open for new candidates before considering reappointments of termed-out members.

The Capital Planning Committee plays a crucial role in Winchester's governance, overseeing major infrastructure projects and managing both the Building Stabilization Fund and Capital Stabilization Fund. The committee must balance immediate needs with long-term planning while working within significant budget constraints.

Rascionato will serve a term expiring in January 2028, bringing his experience in finance and operations to bear on the committee's challenges.

The transition marks what Select Board members characterized as a significant change in committee leadership while raising important questions about how town governments can balance the benefits of experience with the need for fresh perspectives in local governa

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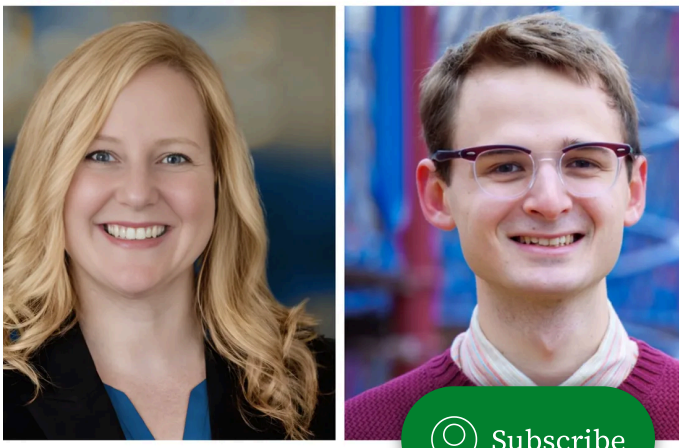

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'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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